



# Appleby Archaeology Newsletter



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## *A note from the Chair*

This is turning out to be rather a busy year!

As I'm sure you know, Appleby was recently awarded "Heritage Action Zone" (HAZ) status and will now receive financial assistance to progress a range of heritage-related projects. Apparch was involved with the initial bid for HAZ status and is now working with the HAZ management. We don't yet know exactly what this will mean for us but it's sure to open exciting opportunities to develop our existing DigAppleby project.

Speaking of which, last month saw us digging again at the top end of the town (see the Blog for details) and on Sat 15<sup>th</sup> July (the start of the National Festival of Archaeology) we'll be in the TIC installing a display to present the results of the project to date. This will include a very nice (free) brochure that features many fine colour photographs of our members in action - variously surveying, digging and transcribing documents. Make sure you're there to get a copy!

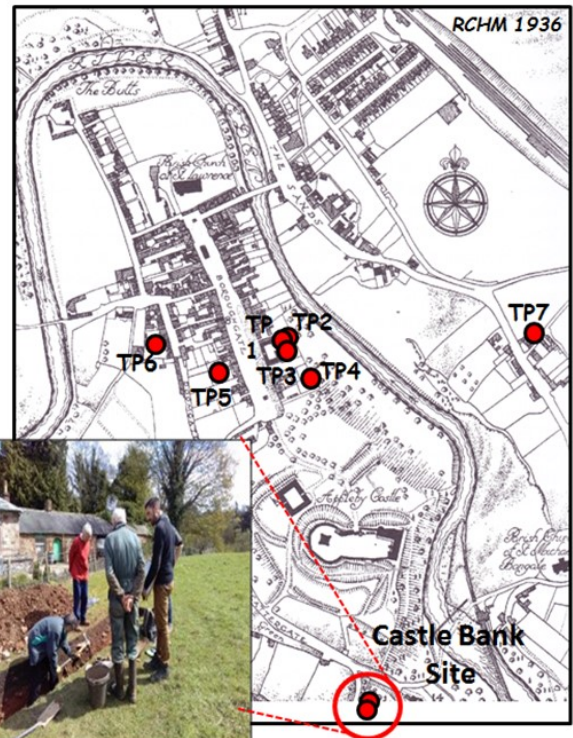
Last month's event at Dacre was a sell-out event with over 30 people turning up to hear an excellent impromptu lecture by Rachel Newman and although the weather was very discouraging, Richard Grivil's commentary about St Michaels Church at Barton on 8<sup>th</sup> June was fascinating.

Have a great summer, **Martin Joyce**

## Dig Appleby

Martin Railton had obtained permission for DigAppleby to excavate some small archaeological trenches at Castle Bank on the edge of Appleby, in order to look for evidence of buildings depicted on the 1754 town plan. This is one of the few plots in Appleby believed to have been occupied in the medieval period, which has not since been re-developed. Here's Martin's initial appraisal of the results:

*"Just to say a big thank you for all the hard work over the last three days. Three days go so fast when you are digging and the Friday was certainly a rush to the finish line! You all moved a lot of earth (and the backfilling yesterday was hard work) but it was well worth it as*



*we found the dwelling we were looking for and more.*

*The finds are still to be analysed by Sue from Wardell Armstrong, but what we do know is that there was certainly a building on the site, which was probably subdivided, with a dwelling to the west, and area for animals to the east, situated on a sunken house platform surrounded by clay and stone banks. The excavated evidence included the remains of a flagged floor with a western entrance doorway, sandstone walls which were held together with mortar, external (?) cobbled path, and a rough cobbled yard area (for animals) with drain (found last minute by Andy). The building was demolished in the late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century based on historic mapping and the finds recovered. We have some limited medieval evidence (including a possible clog/shoe), but the date of the original structure so far is uncertain. We have certainly proven that archaeology survives in the field, and we may get to revisit in the future to reveal more of the site now we have confirmed its survival. Thank you again for all your help and hard work. Enjoy your bank holiday weekend!*

*Best wishes, **Martin Railton***

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## Dig Appleby - *palaeography*

The small but enthusiastic group of people have learned a great deal about Appleby and its inhabitants by reading and transcribing of over 80 medieval documents written in the 1500s and 1600s. These early documents were mostly precise, detailed reports and accounts – who did what work in the town, what they were paid and who owed money for tolls, taxes or other payments.

Occupations mentioned in the documents were numerous and various .. a *theeker* (thatcher) who thatched a *common backhouse* (bakehouse) for 15 shillings, a *glasner* (glazier) who was paid 20 shillings for repairing ‘*mute hall glasse windowes*’ and a *pavior* who repaired and replaced paving stones, while *hedge-lookers* and *swine-lookers* kept an weather eye on fences, enclosures and wandering pigs. Robert Bayliffe and Thomas Harrison “*constables for Bongate*” received five shillings for their “*task monie for the bridge*” as did Thomas Wilson and James Darbie “*constables for Scattergait and Burelles*”. Wives and widows appear in some documents. They are always referred to as the “*wife of*” or “*widow of*” a named male. In most entries these women were recorded as providing ‘*Drinke to the workmen*’ and receiving a fairly standard payment of 4d.

Unusual now obsolete words were discovered some probably of ery local usage included *freelidge* (payment to a freeman), *stallage* (fee for market stalls) and *gatelay* (?tax related to corn). Several words were immediately recognisable – *wauller*, *lattes*, *morter*, *sparres*, *nyales*, chimlay but others posed a bit more of a challenge such as *showling* (shovelling), *watlinges* (wattle) and *astrie* (a hearth).

Momentous events nationally were also recorded, There was a payment of 2 shillings “*to one messenger for bringing letters from Yorke of the birth of the young prince*” to Appleby in 1630 ... the birth of the future Charles II. Also apparent in the documents is a social change following the introduction of the Poor Laws from a generally considerate and caring society to one in which the poor inhabitants were treated harshly. Later documents record the erection of the gibbet, a whipping post and a pillory and one Reynold ? being paid 6s and 4d “*for keeping of vagabondes and beggars out of the town*”.

**Summary of a report by Carol Dougherty**

## Dig Appleby The Chamberlain Accounts

The Chamberlain Accounts of 1585-1625 provide not just a record of income and expenditure but also a unique window into everyday life in Appleby some 400 years ago. As the layout of town has remained almost unchanged and many of the surnames mentioned still flourish in the town, it is quite easy to visualise what life must have been like when the chamberlains wrote their accounts.

Several large building projects took place during this period and detailed records of the cost of procuring materials as well as associated labour costs have survived. Appleby appears to have been almost completely self-sufficient at this time with local people building and maintaining of town property and keeping the all-important bridge over the River Eden in good repair.

The most important civic building, the Moot Hall, was built about 1596 and although records have not survived from that year, accounts for 1617 indicate the building was slated rather than thatched as was typical at that time. A slater named John Smith charged twenty pence for a cartful of slate to roof the building and 6½ bushels of lime for four shillings and six pence. He was also paid eight shillings for “*mossing and limeing the same*” while Christopher Sowerbie received eighteen shillings for “*getting the mosse*”. In the days before under-felting it was customary to pack any voids under the slates with moss and then seal it with lime mortar in a process called underdrawing. Although effective it keeping out water it had a limited life span because it would fall away as the moss degraded.

There are also details about the construction of a ‘Common Bakehouse’ in High Wiend with stone walls raised by three ‘*wallers*’ from Drybeck with timber for the roof supplied by Thomas Ubanke from Dufton Wood and then thatched by a ‘*theeker*’ called John Fairer with ‘*threescore threave of straw*’ provided by James Warriner.

There are only two cases in these accounts where skills had to be sought from outside the town .. repairing the Market Bell and a clock to ensure it was rung at the correct time to open market trading. A clockmaker named Simonde Washington had to be sent for ‘*upon he came to see the clock*’ at a cost of two shillings.

**Summary of a report by Barbara Blenkinsop**

## Cumwhitton Viking Cemetery Excavation, conservation & analysis

Adam Parsons of Oxford Archaeology North presented the first of two talks about the Viking cemetery at Cumwhitton to the Appleby Archaeolgy Group on the 9<sup>th</sup> March, focusing upon the excavation, conservation and analysis of the site.

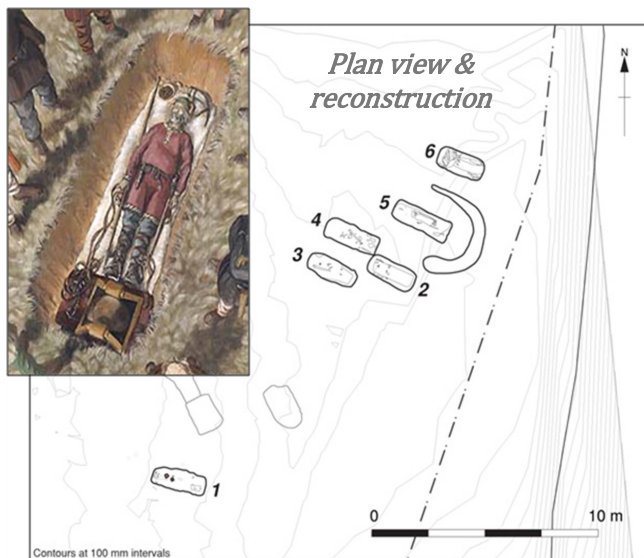
In March 2004 a metal detectorist found an unusual object in a field near the village of Cumwhitton in the Eden Valley and reported the find to the Finds Liaison Officer of the Portable Antique Scheme (PAS). This object was thought to be a rare Viking oval brooch usually found in pairs typically associated with female burials. The detectorist returned to find a second brooch. A survey of a wider area found small fragments of another brooch and the remains of an early medieval sword hilt, together with many more modern metal objects. These findings encouraged a closer examination of the site



As it was under immediate threat from ploughing, the PAS commissioned Oxford Archaeology North to investigate using funds provided by English Heritage. The top soil was stripped back to reveal a grave associated with the initial discoveries together with a further five graves (numbered 1-6), clustered together some 10m away, all with grave goods dating to the early tenth century. Only one other Viking cemetery site has been identified in England making the Cumwhitton discovery especially exciting.

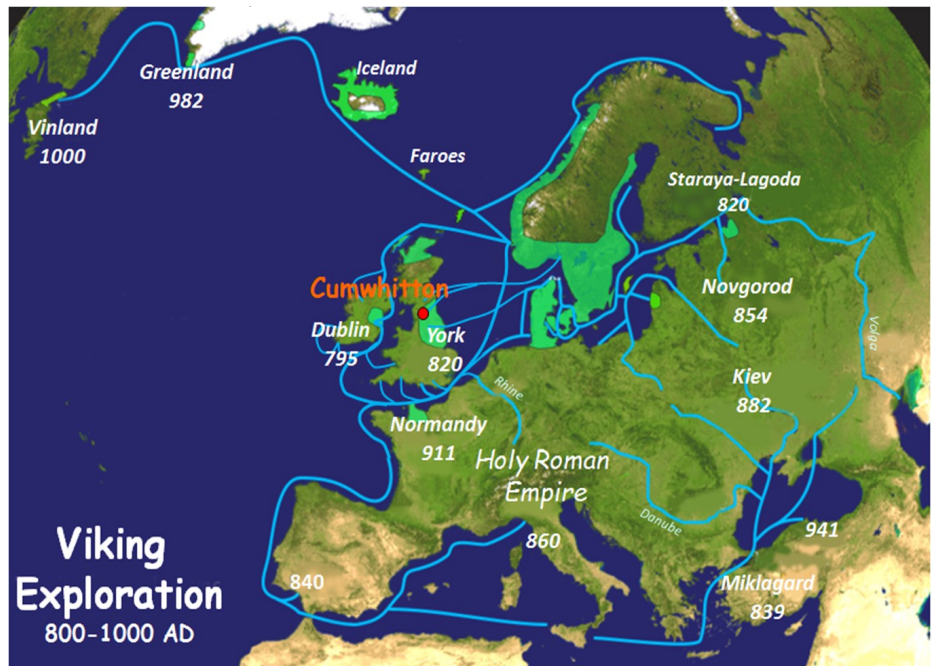
With the exception of a small skull fragment in Grave 1, human and animal remains were decomposed because of the very acidic soil and most of the artefacts found were in a poor state of preservation.

Consequently it was decided to proceed using a combination of careful excavation and block lifting (large blocks of undisturbed soil). These were sent to the English Heritage's conservation laboratory in Portsmouth for forensic examination under controlled laboratory conditions.

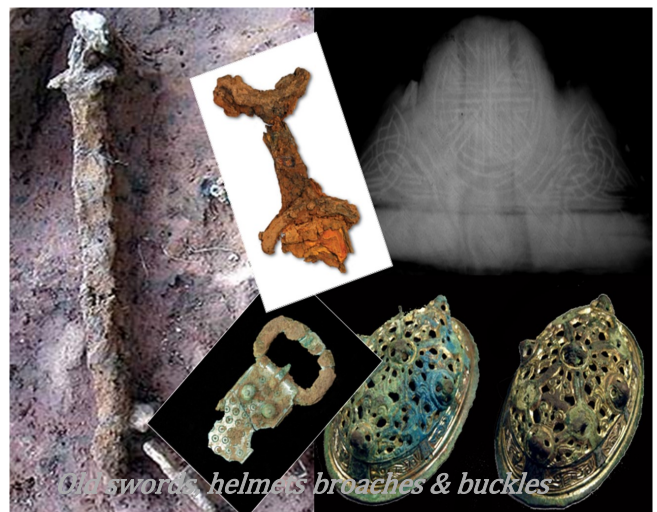


### Cumwhitton Viking Cemetery

The soil blocks were first x-rayed to identify any artefacts present and then the X-rays were used to guide their excavation. They were then cleaned and conserved. Adam showed several X-rays of these artifacts. Typically they were heavily corroded and some only left shadowy images with little evidence of the original object. One example of this was a needle from a Maplewood sewing box found in Grave1. Adam continued by describing the artefacts found in each grave.



Traces of organic matter on the surface of some metal objects provided clues about their original form. This was used to identify sword scabbards made of fleece lined wood and covered in leather. A buckle with seal skin fibres compressed between two plates suggested a seal skin belt or perhaps some other garment.



The grave goods provided some information about the identity of the person buried. The artefacts in Graves 1 and 2 suggested they were the graves of women as they contained antler combs, beads and rings. Grave1 contained a a Maplewood box with objects associated with textiles including shears, a spindle whorl and possibly needles. Graves 3-6 were probably the graves of men because they all contained weapons including swords, shields and in one case, an axe and shield boss. It is also possible that many of the objects buried had a symbolic meaning.

The talk ended with thanks and enthusiastic applause.

*Phyllis Rouston*

## Cumwhitton Viking Cemetery Reconstruction and Interpretation

**Why was an axe thrust into the grave?** This was just one of the many questions posed by Adam Parsons on 13<sup>th</sup> April when he gave his second talk to the Group about the interpretation of the Cumwhitton Viking burial site and reconstruction of the artefacts found there.

He began by recapping the points made in his first talk. Because of the acidic Cumbrian soil most of the bones, flesh and cloth originally interred in the graves had been destroyed leaving only residual and very weathered traces. However enough was found to provide a remarkably detailed view of the original contents. As the practice of burying valuable possessions in graves was a pagan custom and the Vikings had converted to Christianity by the second half of the tenth century, Adam pointed out the cemetery must have predated that time.

A number buckles and strap ends had been found in four of the graves. These were made of copper alloy and decorated with rings, dots and boss capped rivets. After some experimentation, Adam found he could reproduce all the decorative schemes on the belt fittings quite easily. He then went on to the reconstruct many of the objects including the sewing box from Grave 1, a sword with an intricate wire design on each side of the pommel from Grave 3, a shield boss from grave 4 and a drinking horn from grave 5.



### *Do you need a Viking shield? reconstructions by Adam Parsons*

He described in some detail how he had been able to reconstruct these objects using the tools, techniques and materials that would have been available at the time, wherever possible. The results were quite amazing, demonstrating how they would have originally looked when in the graves. These reconstructions recorded sometimes very subtle details such as patterns on metal work with a two tone effect which would

have glittered in the candle light of the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

Interpretation is challenging. Cemeteries of this period are very rare, but comparisons with other burials provide some clues about the culture of early Viking settlers. Evidence of trading is suggested by similarities with objects found in the Eden Valley and elsewhere and in particular with belt fittings in graves at Workington and Carlisle. Indeed many of the artefacts discovered at Cumwhitton appear to have come from a variety of cultures from different regions in the Viking diaspora. The hilt of sword from grave 3 is characteristic of a pre-mid 10<sup>th</sup> century style found in continental Europe, other military artefacts were probably manufactured in Scandinavia and some of the textile remnants compare with those in other parts of Britain.

The distribution of the grave goods at the Cumwhitton site indicates that all the bodies had been laid with their heads to the west. This may have been a possible gesture towards Christianity although a similar orientation has also been observed in many pagan graves in Scandinavia. Furthermore the arrangement of the Cumwhitton graves appears to define distinct spaces. Similar spaces found at Viking burial sites in Ireland, Orkney and Denmark contained dead animals. Were the same practices being followed at Cumwhitton and the remains subsequently decomposed?

The burials were clearly carried out with care and ritual. Objects appear to have been laid down in a particular sequence. Spears were placed last on top of the grave goods and shields positioned to cover parts of the body. Most of the bodies were shrouded. Impressions of textiles in the graves and the position of ringed pins buried with the men, suggest that cloaks were wrapped around the bodies and pinned as shrouds. Insect larvae were found on the brooch of the woman in grave 1, suggesting her death took place sometime before burial. Was she someone of importance who lay in state for some time before being interred? Further evidence of care comes from two other burials where both a man and a woman had been placed on fleece laid over oak boards. Traces of fleece were found on the axe head thrust into grave 4. Was this a ceremonial act?

There is no way of knowing the answers to these questions. However Adam was able to draw some insightful conclusions. The cemetery appears to have been used for perhaps two generations in the early 10<sup>th</sup> century. The objects found suggest that they were well established farmers and probably traded for goods from sometimes quite distant lands. Although there is no evidence of a Viking farmstead nearby this may lie below the modern village. The care taken in their burial implies they were people of importance and probably buried with some ceremony.

Adam ended by presenting a small exhibition of the objects he had constructed. He was once again thanked and applauded for another fascinating talk.

*Phyl Rouston*